

Second progress report on planning for Milan's future

By Ross Williams, Chair
Milan Comprehensive Plan Special Review Board

As reported two months ago, your Comprehensive Plan Board has reviewed survey data and conducted public forums to understand the vision and values of our citizens and is in the process of formulating goals and recommendations for the Town's consideration.

The vision and values can be summarized into four areas:

To maintain the rural character of Milan

To remain primarily a residential community with limited small-scale commercial activity.

To protect the open space and natural resources which are so important to the rural character and lifestyle of Milan.

To restrain the growth of taxes to enable current residents to remain in Milan.

Our goal is to develop a plan that takes your views into consideration.

We need your feedback on what you think about the ideas laid out in this paper.

Our new comprehensive plan is due to the Town Board early next year for their consideration and adoption.

Three public workshops are scheduled for November 13, 17, and 19 to review and discuss these directions proposed for the Town.

Our findings confirm what you say and what you see

Rural Character

Town surveys show that nearly everyone values and wants to preserve Milan's rural character. But what is "rural character?"

Well, the state defines a rural community as that which has a population of less than 150 people per square mile. Milan's current population density today is about 80 people per square mile today if you include second-home owners -- the lowest rate in Dutchess County (based on census data). We can roughly double our population and remain "rural" by the state's definition.

As you'll see later in this paper, population density not only affects the perception of town character, but also has an impact on tax increases.

Population growth is the fastest in the area

Milan's natural beauty and location along the Taconic State Parkway are causing dramatic growth with rising land and home prices and dramatically increasing rates of development.

Milan grew three-times as fast as the average town between 1990 and 2000 and we project Milan will continue to have very rapid population growth.

2004 has seen a dramatic increase in the number of applications for residential site approvals, about 500% of the level seen in recent years. *See chart next page.*

This data does not include second-home owners who would not show up in the census or the impact of the Durst Organization's proposed development of 975 new homes on the Milan / Pine Plains Border.

Milan's population growth is among fastest in the area

TOWN	1990	2000	% Change	mid-2003 (est).	% Change
Milan	1,875	2,356	24.3%	2,527	5.1%
Clermont	1,443	1,726	19.6%	1,798	4.2%
Stanford	3,495	3,544	14.0%	3,708	4.6%
Pine Plains	2,287	2,569	12.3%	2,674	4.1%
Red Hook	9,565	10,408	8.8%	10,990	5.6%
Clinton	3,760	4,010	6.6%	4,168	3.9%
Rhinebeck	7,558	7,762	2.7%	8,118	4.6%
Gallatin	1,658	1,499	-9.6%	1,471	-0.6%
TOTAL	31,661	34,054	7.6%	35,454	4.1%

Build Out Analysis

The Dutchess County Environmental Management Council completed a build out analysis for Milan that looks at how many buildings could be built under current zoning. The table below shows that Milan has over 9800 buildable acres (buildable acres subtracts land that can not be built on because it is protected, is too steep or too wet) spread across its various zoning districts. Using a standard 20% reduction to reflect the needed addition of infrastructure to support development, and to allow for odd lot size in some cases, the maximum number of potential new lots is then calculated by dividing the acres by the minimum lot size. In Milan's case, this would yield an additional 2,356 building sites.

Our current residential sites number 1100, so the total residential sites, if built out, would be approximately 3,450. If our density today is 65, this would suggest that Milan could grow to a density of around 200 per square mile, not including second home owners, or including them, approximately 250 per square mile.

Of course, such build out projections are theoretical and long term. However, the magnitude of the build out indicates that we would, at some future time become a suburban community, no longer "rural", under our current zoning. If we do not want that future, we are most fortunate that we have the opportunity, before development occurs to influence our future.

Environmental resources

Milan has a very rugged and varied topography, with ample streams and wetlands, steep slopes, ridgelines, all of which support diverse wildlife and habitats. Surveys have shown that Milan residents rate protec-

tion of our environmental resources very high. Yet we have few protections in place for these important facets of our Town. Wetlands in some areas of town have not been mapped, and Milan is one of the few towns in Dutchess County that has not completed a Natural Resources Inventory.

Our Conservation Advisory Council is in process of now doing this work.

Environmental constraints rarely prevent building on large parcels like we have in Milan. But our environmental resources should guide where and how we permit development if we are to protect them.

"Build-out" analysis shows Milan's building sites could triple with current zoning

Zone	Min Lot Size	Total Buildable Acres	Minus 20%	Potential New Lots
A3A	3	4,587	3,669	1,223
HA	1	230	184	184
LC	5	58	47	9
R2A	2	631	505	252
A5A	5	4,299	3,439	688
TOT		9,805	7,844	2,356

Impact of growth on taxes

Using the format of a Marist College study completed in 2001 for the Town of Unionvale, our research shows that the Town of Milan is well positioned compared to other Towns in the county in the efficient use of its tax base.

A significant reason for that is our low population density. As population density increases, there are more demands on the taxing power of the municipality and taxes need to go up.

The significant driver of property taxes is the expense of our schools. Using state measurements which exclude debt service, transportation, and special education, the three school districts serving Milan have roughly the same cost of educating a child, around \$7,000 (excludes transportation, special education, and debt service costs).

Red Hook has published a planning document for use with its municipal officials that states a typical new home has 1.5 children, therefore costing the school district \$10,350.

In Milan, a new house would

have to be assessed at approximately \$600,000 to break even on school taxes. Houses worth less than that add to the taxes paid by others in the school districts.

So rapid development of average-priced homes brings with it increased taxes to educate the added students. Rapid development also creates a need to build new school facilities over and above the cost of education just mentioned. Clearly there is little a school district can do to control development -- that power rests with the municipal officials in the Towns they serve. We see the impact of school taxes in the chart below.

Commercial development

There are essentially two ways to put a brake on residential tax growth.

One is by slowing residential development, particularly unbalanced residential development that brings large numbers of new students to the community.

The second is commercial development. It is important not to overestimate the impact of commercial develop-

ment, however.

The Red Hook School Board report highlights that the new Hannaford pays for education costs for only 24 students. It takes a lot of commercial development to meaningfully affect taxes.

Milan citizens have made clear that they do not want large scale development and that they want to protect Route 199 from strip development. With the exception of the Route 199 corridor, the topography and road system of Milan are such that there are few areas of town that are conducive to commercial development. The citizens of the town have also made clear that they do not want a floating light industrial zone which can put industrial uses in residential areas.

There is considerable home business activity in Milan; other mixed residential-commercial use is allowed in the hamlets of Lafayetteville and Rock City.

These should be encouraged as forms of commercial activity that is compatible with the town's topography and citizens' values.

Tax growth from 1999 to 2004

	Year 1999	Year 2003	Year 2004	One-year Increase	Five-year Increase	% total 2004
Total tax levy	4,125,863	4,742,330	5,413,765	14.2%	31.2%	100.0%
County	680,417	565,164	689,923	22.1%	1.4%	12.7%
School	2,926,949	3,519,189	4,015,549	14.0%	37.2%	74.2%
Town & district	518,496	657,977	708,293	7.6%	36.6%	13.1%

New planning concepts

We find that there is a great deal of change underway across our county, state, and nation with respect to municipal planning and zoning.

Zoning grew largely out of the post World War II desire to manage the explosive suburban growth that occurred. What has been learned the hard way, is that traditional zoning -- that sets fixed lot sizes and uses in discreet areas of a municipality -- causes sprawl, suburbanization, and destruction of our landscapes that does not contribute to our quality of life.

New, more flexible approaches to development and open space protection are gaining rapid acceptance, and can help us to keep Milan the rural residential community our citizens want for their future. *Read more inside...*